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ABSTRACT

Controversy often arises over the teaching of English literature in courses and programs in English as a foreign language (EFL). However, language and literature cannot be separated. Each has something important to offer in the development of a well-rounded student. Literature teaches idiomatic language and cultural context; it can also improve reading and comprehension skills, promote correctness in speech and writing, and encourage students to read for enjoyment. Teaching language in isolation from literature will not move students toward mastery of the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). Literature is language at its best. (MSE)

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"English Language and Literature in EFL Situations"

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Abstract

This paper attempts to answer recurrent questions concerning the value of the teaching of English literature in EFL situations. It recommends the introduction of English literature as a vital vehicle in English language teaching at the earliest possible opportunity in its simplified, abridged and full forms. The argument is that language and literature should go hand in hand.

In the bulk of this paper, I will address myself to the literature - versus - language issue by raising some questions, trying to answer these questions, evaluating relevant opinions and finally offering some suggestions and solutions. These questions are:

First: should we teach literature at all? If so, then what kind of literature should we teach?

And when and how to teach it?

Second: what role does literature play in EFL situations?

what determines its role? Does it do any good?

If so, then how?

The eternal question whether to teach literature at all, what kind of literature should we teach and how and when to teach it has for long constituted the subject of controversy that is not yet settled. As a matter of fact, heated debates are going on at Arab universities concerning the roles of both "language" and "literature" in teaching English to Arab university students. Stressing the need for correcting the unbalanced course offerings of both language and literature in the English programs at Arab universities, many scholars have voiced their opinions favoring a decrease in the number of literature courses; whereas others have suggested an increase rather than a decrease of these literature courses. Zughoul (1982) asserted that so much literature was the cause of the failure of the English Department to achieve its major objective, i.e, graduating competent English specialists who are badly needed in our society

because of the need for English as a language of science, technology, business and international communication." John (1986), on the other hand, states that "the failure of linguistics to deal adequately with the idiomatic norms of English can be made up for by familiarity with English literature, where one finds English at its idiomatic best. A student of linguistics learns about language, while a student of literature learns language as used in poetry, drama, fiction, or any other genre ."The upholders of these somehow biased views underestimate the fact that literature and language should go together; like body, like soul. As literature is a vehicle through which we can have contact of all roots with other cultures, peoples and societies, language is the means to carry that out. Wilkin (1977:11) stated that "while without grammar very little can be said, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed."

The point is that we can not learn or teach English in EFL situations by ignoring either the linguistic/language aspect or the literature aspect because we need to learn language in context and learn about it too. A combination of these two sides of the same coin will facilitate our endeavour .

Whether learners or teachers of English literature in EFL situations, we should not overlook the fact that teaching literature should aim, too, at improving the skills of comprehension and reading, promoting a higher degree of correctness in speech and writing, and encouraging students to read with enjoyment works of art (e.g. short stories, plays, poems, etc.). In addition,

literature,as a noble human activity, offers a harmless means of entertainment. In other words,it teaches and delights. We cannot, thus, imagine that one can study a language without studying its literature—that aspect of creative thinking. Those who are against teaching foreign literature may raise the point that it (teaching literature) may affect the native values and native culture. On the contrary, students' values may be consolidated and strengthened by being exposed to foreign culture through its literature as long as the type of literature taught is well-chosen. As a matter of fact, their values will benefit by strengthening them and the experience they acquire is rewarding. In the meantime, we do not have to veil the fact that we often deal with students of English as a foreign language in the department of English in the third world countries who do not have the chance to absorb their own national (local) literature, i.e, they are not well-protected, language and culture-wise. This is quite significant for if they can enrich the foreign text by bringing their native cultural background, then, we can get a balanced view of all English literature written, learnt,and taught in EFL situation.

Summaries and Conclusions:

- Language and literature cannot be divorced. The argument against divorcing these both components should be seen untenable. Each component has to offer something for the development of an individual(student) who is linguistically and literarily well-equipped. Teaching language in isolation from literature will

not help the students forward to a better mastery of the four language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

- Teaching literature leads to a cultural understanding and cultural communication.

- Questions have been raised about the wisdom behind teaching old English literature in an English program at a university level. In this respect, we should remember that it is not a question of usefulness here. One may rightly claim that through such type of literature, we can trace the development of the phonological, morphological, syntactic and semantic aspects of language in context, i.e, poems, stories, plays, etc. What is literature after all? Isn't it language at best?

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